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ABSTRACT

During the 1974-75 academic year at the North Carolina State University, the frequency and types of difficulties experienced by undergraduates enrolled at the school were investigated. Other study objectives were to determine whether different subgroups within the student population would exhibit more problems in a particular area than in others, and to obtain information on which services would most likely be utilized and how the experience with the counseling center would be rated. Usable responses were obtained from 360 of 474 randomly-selected undergraduates. The survey instrument was composed of 18 statements of problems in addition to questions on counseling center services and satisfaction with services. Some statements were classified into one of the following major problem categories: academic, career/vocational, interaction/relationship with others, and emotional. A rank order is provided of the following types of problems: career plans, worry, taking exams, depression, study habits, nervousness, lack of self-confidence, and curriculum choice. A breakdown is presented of the major problems by sex and by student grade-point average. Data are presented on types of services most likely to be used according to year in school, sex, place of residence and grade-point average. (SW)

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PROBLEMS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ON A LARGE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS: COMPARISONS ON THE BASIS OF SEX, GRADES, YEAR IN SCHOOL, AND HELP SEEKING

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INTRODUCTION

During the 1974-75 academic year, the North Carolina State University Counseling Center decided to assess the frequency and types of difficulties experienced by undergraduates enrolled at the University. In so doing the Center hoped to gain a better sense of its role orientation in terms of meeting student needs. Other objectives of the study were to determine whether different subgroups within the student population would exhibit more problems in a particular area than in others and to obtain information about students' perception of their relationship to Counseling Center program (i.e., which services would most likely be utilized and how would experience with the Counseling Center be rated?).

METHOD

To provide data for this study, a survey instrument was developed and given to 474 randomly selected undergraduates during registration for the spring, 1975 semester. Usable responses were obtained from 75% of the sample. A comparison of respondents with the population of undergraduate students enrolled at NCSU in the spring, 1975 semester (Table 1) indicates that respondents closely represented the population in terms of sex, classification, and residence. Respondents were somewhat over-represented in terms of females and on-campus residents.

The survey instrument was composed of eighteen problem statements (e.g., choice of a field of study, nervousness about taking exams, lack of self-confidence, etc.) each of which was indicated as being "no problem," "a slight problem," "a problem," or "a great problem." The survey (Appendix A) also included questions on Counseling Center services most likely to be used and on satisfaction with services.

For some parts of the data analysis, each problem statement was classified into one of the following major problem categories:

1. Academic
2. Career/Vocational
3. Interaction/Relationships with others
4. Emotional

TABLE 1

RESPONDENT-POPULATION COMPARISONS

	Respondents	Undergraduate Population Spring, 1975
Sex		
Male	70.8%	76.1%
Female	29.2	23.9
N =	360	11,637
Classification		
Freshmen	30.6%	29.7%
Sophomore	24.4	25.5
Junior	19.0	21.7
Senior	26.1	23.1
N =	353	11,422
Residence		
Residence halls	57.9%	50.8%
Off-campus	42.1	49.2
N =	342	10,927

The classification of each problem statement in these four categories is shown in Table 2.

RESULTS

Table 3 presents a rank order of problems with which students at NCSU were most likely to express difficulty. The table includes only those problem statements for which 57% or less of the respondents reported no difficulty. Since all other problem statements not shown on this table were reported as "no problem" by 65% or more of the respondents, Table 3 summarizes the major problematic areas for NCSU undergraduates.

As mentioned in the previous section, items on the questionnaire fell into four general categories: 1) Academic, 2) Career/Vocational, 3) Interaction/Relationships with others and 4) Emotional. One notes that items in Table 3 fall into the first three categories mentioned above. In the career-vocational area, students listed making career plans and curriculum choice as being high priority items, while academic problems most frequently checked included difficulties in study habits and test anxiety. Most frequently checked of the personal-emotional problems include worry, depression, nervousness, and lack of self-confidence. Interestingly, difficulties in interpersonal relationships such as those with parents, peers, faculty, etc. were not included among those concerns most frequently expressed by this group of students.

A clarifying point needs to be made with regard to Table 3. Items were ranked according to the percentage of students who reported some difficulty without consideration of the level of seriousness expressed. It should be noted that, for those who reported some level of difficulty, most reported their problem as being "slight." When one disregards the "slight problem" category, the percentages of reported difficulties is reduced considerably. This point will be further discussed in a later section.

Table 4 includes major problems by classification. In the area of career plans an unexpected finding occurs. Seniors are somewhat less likely than others to report problems in this area. This is true particularly for the slight problem category. On the other hand, seniors are slightly more likely to express more serious problems with career planning than are members of the other classes. Although these differences are of interest they were not found to be statistically significant.

TABLE 2

PROBLEMS, BY CATEGORY

Academic
1. Nervousness about taking exams
2. Study habits

Career/Vocational
1. Choice of a field of study (curriculum)
2. Academic ability for this field
3. Making career plans

Interaction/Relationships with others
1. Dating involvement
2. Getting along with my peers
3. Getting along with faculty members
4. Independence from my parents
5. Relationship with my family
6. Parents having expectations of me that are too high.
7. Difficulty in making friends
8. Sexual adjustment
9. Marital adjustment (if married)

Emotional
1. Lacking self-confidence
2. Loneliness
3. Worry
4. Difficulty in controlling my temper
5. Feelings of depression
6. Nervousness

TABLE 3

PROBLEMS MOST FREQUENTLY ENCOUNTERED
BY NCSU STUDENTS

Problem (rank order)	No problem	Slight problem	Problem	Very problematic	N
Career Plans	36.2%	46.9%	12.6%	4.2%	356
Worry	38.[illegible]	45.9	12.3	3.4	35[illegible]
Taking exams	40.2	42.[illegible]	11.8	5.6	356
Depression	44.5	41.7	11.5	2.2	357
Study habits	48.9	37.9	9.3	3.9	356
Nervousness	50.1	41.1	6.5	2.3	355
Lack of self-confidence	50.1	40.0	7.6	2.3	355
Curriculum choice	57.0	27.1	10.6	5.3	358

TABLE 4

MAJOR PROBLEMS, BY CLASSIFICATION

	Career Plans				Taking Exams				Study Habits				Curriculum Choice			
	FR	SO	JR	SR	FR	SO	JR	SR	FR	SO	JR	SR	FR[a]	SO[b]	JR	SR
No problem	31%	34%	36%	46%	35%	35%	40%	52%	45%	45%	48%	56%	41%	55%	61%	75%
Slight problem	49	51	52	37	48	46	40	34	44	42	34	31	36	28	22	20
Problem	18	13	9	10	11	15	12	10	7	9	15	8	16	13	9	3
Very problematic	3	2	3	8	6	4	8	4	4	4	3	6	7	5	8	2
Total	101	100	100	101	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	101	100	101	100	100

	Worry				Depression				Nervousness				Lack of self-confidence			
	FR	SO	JR	SR	FR	SO[b]	JR	SR	FR	SO	JR	SR	FR	SO	JR	SR
No problem	39%	29%	43%	42%	47%	33%	46%	52%	47%	44%	52%	60%	49%	46%	49%	56%
Slight problem	48	54	36	43	39	53	36	40	45	47	36	34	40	48	39	34
Problem	11	14	13	12	13	13	15	7	6	10	8	3	8	5	10	7
Very problematic	2	3	8	3	2	1	3	2	3	0	5	2	3	1	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100	101	100	100	101	101	101	101	99	100	100	100	100

N for freshmen = 109
N for sophomores = 85
N for juniors = 67
N for seniors = 91

[a]Significantly different from junior and senior distribution at the .05 level of significance.

[b]Significantly different from senior distribution at the .05 level of significance.

Another problem area reported in high frequencies was that of test anxiety. One might expect students to be more likely to report difficulty in this area during the earlier years of college training. This was not true of the present sample. Juniors, and particularly seniors, are more likely to report nervousness in taking exams than are freshmen and sophomores. The foregoing is merely suggestive as class differences in test anxiety were not statistically significant.

Student study habits were reported as being no problems by approximately fifty percent of each class. Of these remaining who reported some level of difficulty with study habits, there were no significant differences on the basis of class in school.

When noting data on problems reported in the area of curriculum choice, one discovers results which might be expected. The general trend indicates a decreasing problem of curriculum choice as a function of increasing years in school. In addition to this general trend, there are several statistically significant differences. Freshmen are significantly more likely to express problems in the area of curriculum choice than are those at either the junior or senior class levels. Moreover, sophomores are significantly more likely than seniors to see curriculum choice as an area of concern.

Another frequently reported problem was that of worry. There were no significant class differences in this area. It is probably worth noting however, that sophomores were slightly more likely to express problems with worry than were students in other classes.

An additional emotional difficulty, that of depression, was reported in higher frequencies by sophomores. Sophomores were significantly more likely than seniors to see themselves as having problems with depression. Upon closer scrutiny however, this difference is accounted for by the greater likelihood of sophomores to report "slight problems" with depression.

Problems with nervousness could not be significantly differentiated based on year in school. Seniors were least likely, however, to see nervousness as a problem. Seniors were also less likely to report lack of self-confidence as a problem although these differences were not significant.

Problems frequently reported were also compared on the basis of sex (Table 5). In looking at sexual differences in major problem areas, one finds that females are more likely than males to express difficulties in several areas. One can only speculate as to why this is true. Do females

TABLE 5

MAJOR PROBLEMS, BY SEX

	Career Plans		Taking Exams		Study Habits		Curriculum Choice	
	Male	Female	Male*	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
No problem	36%	37%	43%	33%	49%	49%	57%	56%
Slight problem	48	43	39	52	38	38	27	28
Problem	13	13	12	11	10	8	11	11
Very problematic	3	8	6	5	3	6	5	6
Total	100	101	100	101	100	101	100	101

	Worry		Depression		Nervousness		Lack of self-confidence	
	Male*	Female	Male*	Female	Male	Female	Male*	Female
No problem	42%	31%	49%	35%	52%	47%	55%	39%
Slight problem	45	46	37	52	40	42	37	47
Problem	10	17	12	11	6	9	8	8
Very problematic	2	6	2	3	2	3	1	6
Total	99	100	100	101	100	101	101	100

N for males = 252

N for females = 104

*Significantly different from female distribution at the .05 level of significance.

actually have more problems in these areas or are they more willing than males to admit them? Major problems for which females reported statistically greater difficulty were test anxiety, worry, depression, and lack of self-confidence.

A final comparison of problems was made among students with different grade-point-averages. In the area of curriculum choice, the general trend observed is one of increasing difficulty as a function of decreasing grade point average. Problems reported in this area by students in the lowest GPA category are significantly greater than for students with the highest grades. One might expect such a finding based on the idea of low grades as a function of lack of direction in academic curriculum. Another argument that might be put forth is lack of success in a chosen curriculum as leading to indecisiveness as to an alternative plan of study. The present findings may well indicate a combination of the above.

An expected finding of the survey indicates that text anxiety is inversely related to grade point average among these respondents. Those with high grades (3.1-4.0) have significantly fewer difficulties with performance anxiety on examinations than those with moderate grades (2.1-3.0) and those with low grades (1.1-2.0). A similar trend is found for study habits with students in the low GPA category reporting significantly greater difficulty in this area than for students with moderate and with high grades. One might very likely argue that students with lower grades tend more frequently to have difficulty in establishing good study habits. This is confirmed for all categories of the sample.

Grades are not significantly related to difficulties in career planning, worry, depression, nervousness, or lack of self-confidence in this sample of students, but differences in some of these problems are of interest. Differences between GPA categories indicate the possibility of a relationship between GPA and self-confidence. Those students with the highest and lowest grades more frequently reported problems with self-confidence while those in the middle grade range were least likely to exhibit difficulties in this area. Could it be that those with the highest grades earn them by way of compensation for perceived inferiority? The same curvilinear relationship was found between GPA and worry.

After obtaining frequency data on problem areas, there were several questions that remained unanswered. We wanted to know whether there were a few students who had many problems or whether there were many students who had just a few problems. Moreover, would the answer to this question change

if the level of seriousness of problems were considered. Table 6 begins to answer these questions for us. Survey results were initially divided into levels of seriousness. Included under "Level One" were all those who checked any level of difficulty from "slightly" to "very problematic." Level two included only those items marked "problematic" or "very problematic" and thus represented only those problems of a more serious nature.

When looking at the all inclusive "Level One" category, approximately ninety-five percent of the students expressed some level of difficulty with one or more problems. Approximately thirty-five percent reported some difficulty with between one and five problems while a near equal proportion of students expressed difficulty on six to ten problems. Approximately 22% of the respondents indicated some difficulty on more than ten items.

From the results obtained under the "Problem One" category, one can generally conclude that most students experience some level of difficulty in several problem areas.

In comparison, "Level Two" category provides some very interesting results. When the respondents reporting "slight problem" are excluded, percentages drop markedly. Note that the percentage of those reporting difficulty at this level with six or more items is very small indeed (7.7%). The majority of students indicate five or less problems at "Level Two" while approximately thirty-five percent indicate no difficulties at this level. Comparisons between the sexes for the data in this table resulted in no significant differences.

In summary, Table 7 indicates that when all levels of seriousness are considered, most students indicate difficulty with at least some problems. However, when students who report slight problems are excluded, the large majority of students express difficulty with very few problems. Thus, almost all the students seem to have some problems, but these are not likely to be severe. On the other hand, a very small percentage of students seem to have a serious level of difficulty with a large number of problems (six or more).

Table 8 reveals information about whether students are more likely to utilize Counseling Center services for academic, vocational, or personal problems. Generally speaking, the highest percentage (approximately 40%) of the respondents see themselves as most likely to seek help in dealing with problems of an academic nature, a third would seek vocational services, while the remaining

TABLE 6

MAJOR PROBLEMS BY GRADE-POINT-AVERAGE

	Career Plans			Taking Exams			Study Habits			Curriculum Choice		
	1.1-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0	1.1-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0	1.1-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0	1.1-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0
No problem	35%	37%	37%	28%	38%	57%[c]	20%[b]	50%	64%	41%[a]	59%	65%
Slight problem	47	46	48	46	44	32	58	37	29	33	28	20
Problem	14	13	12	16	13	8	14	9	5	16	9	12
Very problematic	4	5	4	10	5	2	8	3	2	10	4	3
Total	100	101	101	100	100	99	100	99	100	100	100	100

	Worry			Depression			Nervousness			Lack of self-confidence		
	1.1-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0	1.1-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0	1.1-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0	1.1-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0
No problem	32%	42%	35%	42%	47%	39%	38%	52%	57%	42%	54%	44%
Slight problem	50	45	49	40	42	47	50	40	37	42	39	44
Problem	16	10	11	16	9	12	8	6	4	12	5	11
Very problematic	2	3	5	2	2	2	4	2	2	4	2	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

N for 1.1-2.0 = 50
N for 2.1-3.0 = 202
N for 3.1-4.0 = 83

[a] Significantly different from 1.1-2.0 and 2.1-3.0 categories at .05 level of signifiance.

[c] Significantly different from 2.1-3.0 and 3.1-4.0 categories at .05 level of significance.

[b] Significantly different from 3.1-4.0 category at .05 level of significance.

TABLE 7

PROBLEMS BY FREQUENCY AND SERIOUSNESS

# of Problems	Level 1[a]	Level 2[b]
None	4.4%	39.2%
Few (1-5)	34.7	53.1
Some (6-10)	38.3	6.9
Many (>10)	22.5	0.8
N =	*360*	*360*

[a]Level 1 includes percentage who reported problem as "very slight," "problem" or "very problematic."

[b]Level 2 includes only those who responded "problem" or "very problematic."

22% indicate a likelihood of seeking services addressed to personal problems.

When these results are analyzed by class, there is a slight trend toward seeking help in dealing with academic difficulties as a function of decreasing year in school. Freshmen express a greater likelihood of seeking help with academic problems (54%) than any other group. Seniors report a significantly lower probability of using counseling services for such problems.

As might be expected, those closest to entry into the job market, seniors, expressed the greatest probability (43%) of seeking assistance in the vocational area.

Those most likely to utilize the Center for personal problems were sophomores (27.4%) followed closely by seniors (25.6%). Freshmen, on the other hand, were significantly less likely to place a priority on seeking aid in dealing with problems of personal nature.

When looking at the data by sex in Table 8, one finds that a higher percentage of females (50%) than males (40%) stated that they would be most likely to seek assistance in the academic area. On the other hand, males tend more than females to express the probability of availing themselves of services oriented to personal or vocational problems. While the findings reported in this paragraph are of interest, they should be considered merely suggestive since differences in the type of services students would seek did not prove statistically significant on the basis of sex.

Off-campus versus on-campus residence seems to make little difference in the type of service a person is likely to seek. No discussion of residence in King Village or Fraternity Court is made here due to the low number of respondents in these categories.

Finally, when compared on the basis of grade point average, there were no statistically significant differences in the type of service for which respondents would seek assistance.

Despite this fact, it seems worthwhile to report that those with lower grades (2.0 and below) were more likely than their academically more successful counterparts to express the probability of seeking aid for academic problems.

Table 9 shows the proportion of different categories of NCSU undergraduates who reported having used the Counseling Center and their reported degree of satisfaction with the service. In the first category, approximately equal proportions of males and females report having used the Center (23.5% and 22.1%, respectively). Females report a slightly higher level of staisfaction

TABLE 8

COUNSELING CENTER SERVICE MOST LIKELY TO BE USED BY CLASSIFICATION, SEX, RESIDENCE, AND GPA

	CLASS				
Type of Service	Freshmen	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Total
Academic	54.3%	40.5%	46.0%	31.4%	43.5%
Personal	15.2	27.4	22.2	25.6	22.2
Vocational	30.5	32.1	31.7	43.0	34.3
N =	*105*	*84*	*63*	*86*	*338*

	SEX		
Type of Service	Male	Female	Total
Academic	40.6%	50.0%	43.4%
Personal	23.4	18.6	22.0
Vocational	36.0	31.4	34.6
N =	*239*	*102*	*341*

	RESIDENCE		
Type of Service	On-Campus	Off-Campus	Total
Academic	44.9%	43.5%	43.4%
Personal	21.7	22.1	22.0
Vocational	33.5	34.4	34.6
N =	*194*	*131*	*341*

	GPA			
Type of Service	4.0-3.1	3.0-2.1	2.0-1.1	Total
Academic	43.2%	40.0%	55.3%	42.7%
Personal	19.8	25.1	21.3	22.7
Vocational	37.0	35.9	23.4	34.5
N =	*81*	*195*	*47*	*330*

TABLE 9

EVALUATION OF COUNSELING CENTER BY UNDERGRADUATES WHO HAVE USED SERVICES, BY SEX CLASSIFICATION, RESIDENCE, AND GPA

SEX

Evaluation	Male (N=60)	Female (N=23)	Total (N=83)
Very satisfactory	25.0%	21.7%	24.1%
Satisfactory	43.3	60.9	48.2
Unsatisfactory	15.0	13.0	14.5
Very unsatisfactory	16.7	4.4	13.2
Percentage who have used counseling center	23.5	22.1	23.1

CLASSIFICATION[a]

Evaluation	Freshmen (N=17)	Sophomore (N=21)	Junior (N=17)	Senior (N=26)
Very satisfactory	47.1%	19.0%	23.5%	15.4%
Satisfactory	35.3	66.7	64.7	30.8
Unsatisfactory	11.8	9.5	5.9	26.9
Very unsatisfactory	5.9	4.8	5.9	26.9
Percentage who have used counseling center	15.3	24.7	25.4	28.0

[a]Distribution for each class is significantly different from every other class at the .05 level of significance except between freshmen and sophomores.

RESIDENCE

Evaluation	Residence Hall (N=51)	Off-campus (N=27)
Very satisfactory	31.4[b]%	11.1%
Satisfactory	49.0	48.2
Unsatisfactory	13.7	11.1
Very unsatisfactory	5.9	29.6
Percentage who have used counseling center	25.6	18.8

[b]Significantly different from off-campus at the .05 level of significance

GRADE-POINT-AVERAGE

Evaluation	1.1-2.0 (N=10)	2.1-3.0 (N=53)	3.1-4.0 (N=19)
Very satisfactory	20.0%	26.4%	21.0%
Satisfactory	50.0	43.4	57.9
Unsatisfactory	20.0	13.2	15.8
Very unsatisfactory	10.0	17.0	5.2
Percentage who have used counseling center	19.6	25.8	22.4

(82%) than males (68%) although the difference is not statistically significant, possibly because of the small number of respondents involved in this analysis.

Expectedly, as classification of students changes from freshmen to senior, the probability of having used the Counseling Center increases. Fifteen percent of the freshmen and 28% of the seniors reported use. In addition, there were significant differences in statisfaction among the different class levels. The level of dissatisfaction (53%) reported by seniors is of particular interest when compared to dissatisfaction levels of the other classes which range between 11% and 17%.